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March 3, 2010

Senator Pat Krietlow, Chair
Senate Committee on Rural Issues, Biofuels and Information Technology
10 South, State Capitol
PO Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707-7882

Dear Senator Krietlow and Members of the Committee:

The Wisconsin Newspaper Association (WNA) appreciates the opportunity to comment on 2009 Assembly Bill 347 and its companion, 2009 Senate Bill 239, which would allow Wisconsin sheriffs to conduct auctions of unclaimed personal property on the Internet – perhaps on an auction service such as E-Bay. WNA members appreciate the efforts of elected county office-holders to carry out their responsibilities. Certainly taking advantage of new communications technologies is part of seeking new efficiencies. This bill essentially allows a “test drive” of the Internet for a sheriff’s sale. WNA is pleased to note that long-standing provisions for public notice remain intact under this proposal.

That said, while we look to the efficiencies of new technology we cannot forget those Wisconsin citizens who lack reliable and fast access to the Internet. Moving more and more local government content exclusively to the Web means a significant segment of our population will not even be aware it exists, let alone have the ability to access it. For example, a September report compiled by the University of Wisconsin-Extension documented the low rate of high-speed Internet access on farmsteads in south-central Wisconsin. Those findings for Wisconsin support an August 2009 report by the U.S. Department of Agriculture that determined only 59 percent of U.S. farms now have Internet access, compared with 57 percent in 2007. While we look to the future we must keep in mind the realities of today.

Sincerely,

Peter D. Fox

cc: WNA Board of Directors



State Senator

Neal J. Kedzie

11th Senate District

Testimony on SB 239/AB 347

**Senate Committee on Rural Issues, Biofuels,
and Information Technology**

Senator Kreitlow, members of the Committee, thank you for holding a hearing today on Senate Bill 239 and Assembly Bill 347.

Under current law, one of the responsibilities of a County Sheriff is to collect and dispose of unclaimed property in their county. Typically, they collect the property one of three ways:

- recovery of stolen or found merchandise;
- property left by a prisoner at a County Jail when they are either discharged or transferred; or,
- property owned by a deceased resident of a county nursing home or similar institution.

Any property collected by the Sheriff in this manner may be claimed by a person with the legal authority to do so. If property remains unclaimed for more than one year, it is the responsibility of the Sheriff to either sell the property at a public auction or to destroy it.

Senate Bill 239 and Assembly Bill 347 permit a County Sheriff to sell unclaimed property through either a traditional public auction, or an Internet auction site. The bill does not change any existing requirements, such as the property must be held at least one year or that a notice must be posted at three public places describing the auction. It simply allows for the option of an Internet auction.

We introduced this legislation at the request of one of the Counties we represent and believe it has the potential to benefit every county in Wisconsin. We are told that the existing system can be burdensome, and as the auctions are typically limited in participation, they typically provide a minimal financial return.

By allowing Counties to utilize internet sites such as E-Bay, the auction would be available to more people, potentially generating more interest and higher bids, resulting in more revenue to offset the County's costs of collecting, storing, and selling unclaimed property. Please know that the bill simply gives Counties this option, but does not require it. Counties that wish to continue operating as they have in the past can continue to do so.

Finally, Assembly Bill 347 is before your committee after being recommended for passage by the Assembly Committee on Urban and Local Affairs on an unanimous 8-0 vote, and being passed the State Assembly on a voice vote.

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 239 and Assembly Bill 347, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.